

It would seem that the United States has arrived at a critical juncture in its history. Basic institutions, across the socio-economic spectrum, are failing in their efforts to manage. The malaise we feel is reflected in the criticism focused on institutions, agencies of government, private sector businesses, public sector agencies, and representative individuals. We know "things" are not working but we are not quite sure how to make "things" better. Obviously, numerous factors affect how we perceive our problems. Our collective institutional and cultural histories, as people, our genetic inheritance, environmental influences, distinctions of class, race and religion, economic status etc. all affect how we behave. Democracy as an idea has been in existence for millenia but we are still trying to perfect a system which reflects the ideal.

Recently, our nation has faced the greatest challenge ever. In the form of a question, it is, "Is America believable?" People, and particularly poor people, believe that the system works very well for the affluent and influential, but does not work for them. I agree, nevertheless, we should be examining and creating new systems to alleviate the conditions which generate severe stresses within the nation. These stresses appear in form of protest; protests against the Indochina War, protests against poverty and racism, protests against dehumanizing institutions, and protests against the government. The list goes on and on. If we are to continue as a viable nation we must respond to the felt needs of a vast majority of our citizenry.

One response to the cries of the poor was to attempt the notion of "community participation" in federally sponsored programs. The Johnson Administration attempted to open the doors to the disenfranchised through the novel idea of allowing poor people to participate in the design and implementation of programs or projects which serve them. Community participation as a concept and as a reality did not live up to the overblown expectations of the designers or users. In fact community participation has come to be viewed as a hypocritical sham in poor communities all across the nation. Attempts to make middle managers out of persons who really believed that they could change the system by partially controlling a project and being grafted on to a normal, corporate model failed. The trouble is that corporate systems are not flexible enough to adapt to new modes of operation. When the stresses mentioned before acted upon these corporate participation systems, they collapsed. Managers of these systems were caught between the expectations of their constituencies and the restrictive operational modes of the system.

I am suggesting that an alternative to community participation systems be investigated and reported upon. Self management could be a viable alternative to both community participation and regressive or repressive concepts.

Self management is both a theory and a pragmatic method of managing an institution; be it an industry, a business or a socially oriented organization. Some of the basic concepts which make up the theory of self management are:

- The elimination, as much as possible, of racial, religious, or class distinctions in the managing of a "system"
- The sharing of managerial prerogatives through the blending of worker and manager functions
- The elimination of individual ownership as a contest between the haves and the have nots.
- The building of people to people relationships rather than focusing on the relationships of people to things, thereby creating more open and flexible social and business institutions.
- The creation of a system which is self regenerating and which can relate and respond to outside concerns.

These are just a few of the guidelines of a system of self management. Trends can be detected in many parts of existing institutions here and abroad i.e. those in Scandinavia and Yugoslavia. Some of the trends which are visible here are:

- Efforts in industry to promote the team approach to managing
- Profit sharing
- Decentralization
- Resource sharing and resource management on a regional basis
- Reform of the election process

As I view the present situation the spin off benefits of self management could be crucial in the fostering of a belief in a democratic system which really works. If misapplied, self management will, of course become nothing more than a fad further continuing the disbelief in a democracy managed from the top down.

In particular, I am interested in the application of self management concepts to minority and poor community projects where the need for self respect is so desperate. Self respect will remain elusive in this country if people never get a chance to live through an experience which leaves them empowered

and responsible for their own lives. Current trends in community participation have neither empowered nor developed responsibility.

My approach then would be to

1. Examine present systems of self management
2. Examine papers, reports, models and information about self management
3. Form tentative conclusions in relation to community problems
4. Outline a text
5. Write
6. Edit